

The Amazing Spider-Stan Theme Song That Almost Was

Somewhere, tucked away on a server – perhaps on a Helicarrier adrift above Manhattan – are the doleful tones of Stan Lee singing "Spider-Stan."

It's likely we'll never hear it, and really, we're not positive it still exists, but we know that for one glorious moment in time it was a thing, a song sung to the Spider-Man Saturday morning cartoon theme music, created for the credits of LEGO® Marvel Super Heroes, and then killed off, as if by a single snap.

"We had a recording of Stan Lee singing 'Spider-Stan, Spider-Stan, does whatever a Spider-Stan can,' and it was just magic," said Arthur Parsons, who was the creative director at TT Games for LEGO Marvel Super Heroes. "But we couldn't seal the deal on that."



Perhaps it shouldn't be surprising that a game stacked with content from seemingly every facet of the Marvelverse would be home to a few hidden, even unreleased gems.

In the most recent episode of the LEGO Bits N' Bricks podcast, Parsons is joined by Andy Dolan, who oversaw animation for the game at TT, and Chris Baker, who was the manager of licensed games at Marvel, to discuss one of the top-selling LEGO video games of all time and how it came together.

Parsons, who had just worked on LEGO Batman 2 and two Harry Potter titles at TT Games, said he couldn't believe his luck when he heard that the studio would get to create a LEGO video game set in the Marvel universe.

More surprising at the time, perhaps, was that Marvel allowed the studio to create something from a blank slate instead of tying it to a single movie, comic, or television show.

Parsons led a small group of developers who spent months basically spitballing ideas, some of which he turned into an on-paper design document. That process started, he said, with the core team just listing out all of the characters and settings that they wanted in the game. Later, they carefully layered a narrative as well as a multitude of game mechanics.

At Marvel, it was Chris Baker's job to go over every creation in the game to ensure it cleared brand compliance. That meant making sure, for instance, that Wolverine's cowl looked right, that Silver Surfer was the exact right color of silver, and on and on.

That must have felt like a never-ending job, because TT kept adding to the game. When LEGO Marvel Super Heroes was released, there were 155 playable characters, each of which had to be minutely checked and rechecked. The studio later added another 14.

Ultimately, Baker used a spreadsheet to ensure that every design, script, and animation was correct as he played through the game multiple times.

"LEGO games are deceptively big," Baker said. "You can beat them in like 8 or 10 hours tops, but you're only like 20% through. The other 80% is about finding characters and all kinds of other stuff, and it takes a long time to do that."

The teams working on character design and animation were constantly iterating and adding things, all the way up to launch.

"It was kind of a dream project for me," head of animation Dolan said. "I've always been a big Marvel fan and a LEGO brick fan. We've worked on some big [intellectual properties] before, but when this one came up it was really – I mean, as an animator, the thing you really want is great characters, and Marvel is just full of great characters. The opportunity to work with them was something that I'd always dreamed of."

It was the sort of immense project that kept the team at TT wondering if they would be able to pull it off, Parsons said. In the end, they did, and several reviews of the game called it a love letter to the Marvel Universe, something Parsons strongly agrees with.

"It's so true on so many levels," he said, "because of all of the content – whether it's something from the Golden Age, something from the '70s Fantastic Four cartoon, whether it's something from one of the movies, whether it's something from a TV show – it was all amazing."

"I remember seeing [the credits] for the first time and it was like 'Wow!' It was almost to the point of bringing a tear to my eye."

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In order of appearance:

[Marvel Helicarrier](#) – Fandom

[Spider-Man theme song](#) – YouTube

[Stan Lee](#) – Official website

[Stan Lee in LEGO Marvel Super Heroes](#) – YouTube

[LEGO Marvel Super Heroes](#) – Official website

[LEGO Batman: The Videogame](#) – Wikipedia

[LEGO Harry Potter: Years 1-4](#) – Wikipedia

[LEGO Harry Potter: Years 5-7](#) – Wikipedia

Transcript

Bits N' Bricks Season 2 Episode 22: LEGO® Marvel and the Missing Spider-Stan Song

June 2, 2021 · 47:33



Bits N' Bricks: Introduction – 00:00

(Child's voice announcing Bits N' Bricks)

Ethan Vincent

Welcome to Bits N' Bricks, a podcast about all things LEGO games. I'm Ethan Vincent.

Brian Crecente

And I'm Brian Crecente. Together we look back at the rich 25-year history of LEGO games, chat with early developers and season studios who have all tackled the creation of video games for one of the most popular and respected toy companies in the world: the LEGO Group.

(Season 2 Bits N' Bricks theme music)

Chapter 1: LEGO Marvel Super Heroes – 00:37

Ethan Vincent

These days Marvel is everywhere from the continued discussion of the amazing Infinity saga movies that ran from 2008 to 2019, to the long list of Marvel television shows, to what's coming out over the next year or two. There's even a new LEGO set that just hit. The Spider-Man themed Daily Bugle includes a 2.7-foot tall replica of the eponymous newspaper building and 25 Marvel minifigures.

But back in 2012, only a half dozen Marvel movies had hit the screen, and none of the television shows had aired yet.

Brian Crecente

Right, to put it in Guardians of the Galaxy terms, the Marvel cinematic universe was still just a twig – a smiling dancing little twig.

Ethan Vincent

Perfect.

Brian Crecente

LEGO video games were in a sort of golden era at the time ushered in by developers TT Games. The game that helped establish the studio that would become TT Games, LEGO Star Wars™: The Video Game, hit in 2005. That was quickly followed by a number of other Star Wars™ video games, then Indians Jones, Rock Band, Batman, two Harry Potters, and Pirate of the Caribbean. Uh, Cuh-RIB-be-an. Care-ib-BEE-an?

Ethan Vincent

Care-ib-BEE-an, yes.

Brian Crecente

Caribbean, yes that. In 2012, they were wrapping up on LEGO Lord of the Rings and Batman 2 when a new opportunity rolled around.

Chapter 2: Interview with Arthur Parsons – 02:01

Ethan Vincent

Arthur Parsons is the head of design at TT Games, and you and I interviewed him, we will be hearing from him very shortly, and he described it not just as a new opportunity, but an opportunity of a lifetime.

Brian Crecente

Yeah, and who wouldn't? We're talking about LEGO Marvel Super Heroes. This is a game that introduced the wider world to the massive, massive Marvel universe at a time when it was just getting to know the likes of Iron Man, the Incredible Hulk, Thor, Captain America, and X-Men.

Ethan Vincent

Don't forget about Marvel's The Avengers, right? It had just come out and really set the stage in many ways for this game.

Brian Crecente

Yeah, that's so right. There's really so much to talk about here, and I think the best thing to do is just to let Arthur take it away. He was there!

(Musical interlude)

Brian Crecente

I know you've worked on a lot of games at TT, and I'm just curious, prior to you first hearing about Marvel, working with Marvel, what were you working on, and what led you into Marvel in terms of game design?

Arthur Parsons

Just trying to think – I think, and I'm pretty sure about this, it was LEGO Batman 2 that came before Marvel, and a little kind of jaunt/side hustle, helping out on LEGO City Undercover. And obviously, we've had great success with LEGO Batman, the original LEGO Batman: The Videogame, and then LEGO Batman 2 suddenly – it just captured people's imaginations in a different way because of the open world, Gotham, and [being] the first video game where the LEGO minifigures spoke and had voices and were brought to life in another dimension. And, I've always been a fan of comics from both sides of the fence. It was a natural progression to think about doing a LEGO Marvel game. When the opportunity arose, let's just say I was first to grab it with like 76 different hands, I think.

Ethan Vincent

Nice. Can you walk us through that scenario, you know, how this idea first came up and how it kind of crossed your desk?

Arthur Parsons

If I remember rightly and correctly, the fact of the matter was that, you know, the LEGO Group had brought back the superhero range. LEGO Batman had been a massive success, but the toy range had stopped before LEGO Batman was released, so like 2008. They did then sort of like rerelease a LEGO superhero range. And that naturally made us look and think, well hold on, that LEGO Super Hero range, you've got the LEGO DC Superhero range, and you've got the LEGO Marvel Superhero range. Clearly, Marvel was having its moments with the movies with Avengers. It was one of those things where it's like, let's, let's make this happen. The LEGO Group obviously wanted it to happen. We'd worked with Disney before, obviously Disney owning Marvel, and we had that conversation of doing a LEGO Marvel game. And it was in those first conversations we sort of said, "Look, we want to do an original game. We don't want to just like follow the movies here, what we would like to do is take a leaf out of what we've learned from the LEGO Batman games, and do an original story because it allows you more flexibility."

Brian Crecente

And I recall, you know, you and I have spoken quite a bit over the years in terms of these other games that came out. I remember you would go on these press tours and talk about the games that were coming out. And I remember many times talking to you about like, all the different properties you were handling. You would often say the one property that you wanted to do more than any other was Harry Potter, of course. And you would – at this stage had already done LEGO Harry Potter: Years 1-4, and LEGO Harry Potter: Years 5-7. So,

when Marvel was first speaking with you, did they have any ideas in mind? What was their sort of goal? And did they give you any sense of direction, or what they wanted the game to contain or not contained?

Arthur Parsons

Yeah, when we were first talking about this game, the decision had to be made. Did we go and try to do an Avengers game, like literally, a straight Avengers game? Or do we try to be something that was more like, spanned more family groups? And you know, at the time (again I'm trying to just make sure I've got the history right in my head), I'm pretty sure that there was only the one Avengers movie that had been released. And you know, the best LEGO games have a number of movies. You need an amount of content to be able to play with. And we just didn't feel we could do the Marvel universe justice unless it was an original story. And that's where the conversation with Marvel, to be fair, it was really difficult to keep that on the straight and narrow because the team, the Marvel game team we were dealing with, were so passionate, as you'd expect about Marvel, and you know, the Marvel content, and so were we. We had to try and keep a lid on it, but the agreement that we had was, we would sort of try and cover all families equally, so X-Men, Fantastic Four, Avengers family: each of the families would get an equal share and be brought together, and crossed over together, and mashed up together, because by doing that, we were going to do something that nobody had actually seen, something that was actually completely unique for a Marvel video game.

Brian Crecente

Right, and that's like the, in some sense, the entirety of the Marvel universe, like it touching on it at least.

Arthur Parsons

Yeah, that's exactly what we tried to do, and you know, if anyone remembers the credits, or hits it up online, the post-credit scene where the Guardians of the Galaxy walk up, this was like before the Guardians of Galaxy were popular. And so I remember people looking going, "Who are these really biz-? Who's this raccoon guy? And who's Drax? And who's Star-Lord? What are these people, and why is there like a tree-thing talking?" And it's like, you look at it now, and it's like it was almost like foretelling the future, but that was the coolest thing with Marvel, because the movies are based on what we're passionate about, which is the comics, you read the comics, you know where the movies, the TV shows, and everything else is going to go, so if you know your stuff, and you put that enthusiasm and passion into your content, the content is timeless and ageless. And all of a sudden, people think we're geniuses, but we're not, we just love comic books. But yeah, some of the stuff in that game, it goes deeper than you can imagine, which I think is why it resonates so well with gamers of all ages.

Brian Crecente

So I know, again, and sort of when we were chatting, I think you mentioned that early on in that sort of pre production phase, which I think lasted like almost half a year, you had this small core team and you did a lot of the design work on paper, is that correct?

Arthur Parsons

(Chuckles) This is a sort of a running joke, always has been a running joke in the studio, because the design team I work with they're brilliant. But we all design in different ways. So some of us, me being probably the oldest, I like to design on paper. There's – some of the people like to design in some sort of 3D program where you can design the stuff more as it would end up being built in Maya, but you'd build it in another software program. We were very much concentrating on the one thing we knew we had to get right, which was every single Marvel character had to feel like the character because everyone knows, everyone knows how Spider-Man moves and acts, everyone knows how Iron Man flies and what he does, and what Hulk does. That was it. That was the most basic thing we had to get right was make those characters really do everything that little 6-year-old Billy or his dad, or mom who's like in their 40s or whatever. Everyone knows what to expect. Give them that, but then give them something they don't expect on top. And that was like where the detail, I guess the devil in the detail is.

Brian Crecente

That must have been, at some time, a little overwhelming. Like you have – I'm a huge Marvel fan. I lean more Marvel than DC. I love comics in general, but the idea of someone just saying, "OK, here's the Marvel universe, the multiverse of all the Marvel things. Do whatever you want." Where do you start? How do you figure that out?

Arthur Parsons

Well yeah. What we actually did was we sat in a room and we just sat there and said, "Right, before we get to writing a story, let's just write every character we want featured, every location we want featured, and then we'll try and make head or tail of it." So, we've all got our favorite characters from the Marvel universe. And so I was a massive advocate for the Fantastic Four. And, everyone probably knows my favorite actual character is The Thing, Ben Grimm. So we all had to write down who we wanted and where we wanted to feature. We want to feature the raft, and we want the Helicarrier, and we want to go to some some wacky, crazy places. So we did that, and then it was like, "How are we going to make this make sense?" I remember, because Steven was like, "We've got to go to the X-Mansion." I was like, "How are we going to get that in there because we're going to have an open world in New York?" And he's like, "Yeah, it's fine, just stick it at the top in New York. And it's almost like Westchester but it's not quite." It's like, "OK, fine, if you think we can get away with it." And he's like, "Yeah, and I want Juggernaut." It's like, "What do you mean?" And he's like, "Well, Juggernaut from the movie just running around, you know, the Vinnie Jones one." And it's like, "Ah, here we go." But that gave us the framework where

we could then sit and almost piece it out with Post-it notes or something, and go, "Right. Characters, locations." And from that framework, we sort of built on it. We had help from a great writer called Mark Hoffmeier, who sort of like helped stitch it together once we got the core locations, and wanting to get the Red Skull in and everyone else, and then it almost sat, like perfectly. We knew we wanted to bring in the Silver Surfer and Galactus. We knew the journey that we needed to take people on. We really desperately wanted to have a Helicarrier in the sky and give people that magical moment.

(LEGO Marvel Super Heroes excerpt: "Gentlemen, we need your back in the Baxter Building pronto. Director Fury wants as much info on those cosmic bricks as you can find")

Arthur Parsons

When you first step off, when you first get, like after level one, to the Helicarrier, and then you get that sort of moment of just falling into New York. These were all the things that we sketched out. It was an awful lot of work to get in there. But, I remember the first time I saw a kid's face as he stepped off the Helicarrier, and he was just like, "Wow!" Absolute mind blown as he fell down towards Manhattan. It was incredible.

Brian Crecente

Yeah, your player count – I know that up to that point, I think it set a record with playable characters in one of your games with Harry Potter, where you had 210 or something like that?

Arthur Parsons

(Chuckles) Yeah.

Brian Crecente

And you wanted to break that with this one. Is that right?

Arthur Parsons

Again, you know, I'll end up in trouble with the people that pay the development fees and the bills but yeah, I wanted to beat the title that we already sort of like maintained – like I remember we got a Guinness World Record for the most number of playable characters in a superhero video game, which is quite an obscure record to be fair.

Brian Crecente

Right. Very specific (laughs).

Arthur Parsons

Exactly. We then had the record for the most number of playable characters in a video game. So that's better. And then we thought why not do both? But the problem is – and

this is where, this why I'm so passionate about this universe and like the comic universes together – as we sort of revealed the game and we, I remember we went to E3, but more importantly, when we went to San Diego Comic-Con that year, and I sat on a panel, which was an incredible experience, and then all of a sudden people are saying, "Is this character in the game? Is that character in the game?" And you sat there going, oh no. No. To say there's what? About 8,000 Marvel characters. You're not going to cover them all. We're not stupid, but the passion some people have for some characters blew my mind. I knew that some people loved Squirrel Girl. I know that some people love Hulkling and Wiccan or Captain Marvel, whoever it is. But then there are also people coming out of the woodwork for some, what I would consider to be, more obscure characters. It's like, OK, there's quite a following. Very, very foolishly, we decided to have some fun with that on social media. And that just went crazy. The requests we were having. So yeah, we ended up with a bigger number.

Brian Crecente

And you basically went on social media and said, "Just tell us what you want in the game. Which characters?"

Arthur Parsons

Yeah.

Brian Crecente

And I'm sure you got a million, well, 8,000 recommendations probably (chuckles).

Ethan Vincent

It's what they say you should do on Social media, is asking people what they want, right?

Arthur Parsons

Yeah. And you know what, it was great. Because connecting with players on that level for a game like ours, it's not something we'd done before. Obviously, games that are aimed at a more mature audience, they have ways of connecting, live service games have ways of connecting. 2013 for a LEGO game, like theoretically aimed at kids, and you have grown men and women hitting you up asking you for this character, that character, the other character, and we're doing everything we can to say yes. I remember I came back from San Diego, and had a team meeting where I debriefed them and was like, "OK, this went well, this went well, this resonated, this stuff was brilliant. Oh, and I'm really sorry, but we're going to need to add another eight characters." And remember the team going, "We're already behind." I was like, "Yeah, but come on, like the people want it. There was a kid came and asked a question at the end of the panel dressed up. And he really wants his character. And I said, 'Yes,' and it was live streamed and I'm really sorry, but can we do it?"

(Laughter)

Brian Crecente

That's the worst. You know you need to stop going to live panels when you start promising fans things will be in your game.

Arthur Parsons

Yeah, I know. But I think that panel, particularly, because, you know, I got to meet Stan Lee, and I was just like absolutely awe-struck.

Brian Crecente

Who, by the way, he's in the game, of course.

Arthur Parsons

Yeah, and that's the thing. We don't have long enough to talk about all the stories for this game, but, I remember when I said internally, I want to put Stan Lee in the game. And I remember people going, "You want to do what?" I said, "Well, look, he is the king of cameos. He comes in the movies. How cool would it be to cameo in the game?" And then people are scratching their head going, "This just – it's not going to happen. It'll cost too much money, or he won't want to do it – " or whatever it was. Anyway, I pushed, and I've got a history of doing this, I pushed and pushed and pushed. And eventually it's like, OK, we'll have a conversation. He just said yes, he was like, sounds like the coolest thing ever. Came in did some voice recording. And that panel was actually the first time he saw the footage of him in the game.

Brian Crecente

That's cool.

Arthur Parsons

And the fact that we not only put him in the game, but then gave him every ability so he could web swing, he could transform into Stan Hulk, had the Stan Iron Man suit. It was just incredible. But the one thing that was meant to go in that never went in was the Spider-Man theme. We just couldn't seal the deal on that. You know, the old school Spider-Man? You know, (sings: Spider-Man, Spider-Man, does whatever a spider can), right? Well, we had Stan Lee's, and again, this never went in the game because we couldn't get the rights to the original song. We had a recording of Stan Lee singing, "Spider-Stan, Spider-Stan, does whatever a Spider-Stan can." And it was just the magic that never happens. But anyway, there you go.

Brian Crecente

What a bummer.

Ethan Vincent

That's a bummer, yeah.

Brian Crecente

For sure.

Arthur Parsons

And that's the thing. This game grew and was so good because of the passion of everyone that was involved in the studio wanting to just go, "Why don't we add this? Why don't we add this? Why don't we add – ?" And that's where every single thing came about, even just this tiniest thing: having Bruce Banner transform to Hulk, and transform back to Bruce Banner. Kids just sat there doing it again and again because they loved it. They thought was the best thing ever.

Ethan Vincent

It is the best thing ever.

Arthur Parsons

You're right. And again, we did the same it was like, let's do something crazy and have it so that you can basically suit up have a have a hall of armor, or basically allow players to run around and then call it a suit of armor, and it suits up exactly as it does in the movies and the comics. And again, it blew people's minds, and that's the thing where the game delivers because it delivers on every single gamer's imagination. This is probably the closest you'd get to an interactive LEGO Group video game. This is, 'I like this character. I wish it did (insert thing),' and guess what? It does. That's the genius of it.

Brian Crecente

It's one thing to say you're gonna have these characters in the game, but you didn't just drop them in, as you know, skins. There was a lot of work. I mean, you mentioned the Hulk transformations. You mentioned the Iron Man suits, but you had to do that with basically all the playable characters, right? Was that – that had to have been, at some point, were you like, "OK, we can only give each character like one ability." Or like, how are you managing that?

Arthur Parsons

We were incredibly lucky, as a group of designers, on this game to have a lead animator, Andy, who didn't know (and to be fair, still doesn't know) how to say no. He is like the most passionate fan. And so every time we would ask for something, he would be like, "Yeah, no, no, not a problem, not a problem." And then come back, not only with what we'd asked for, but like three or four other things. Because the way he got his animation team engaged on that game was beyond like anything I'd seen before. Like, they all picked

like a – you know, each character went to a specific animator. They would do a full breakdown of the character: You know, what the character was known for, things the character's done in comics, and in movies, TV shows, wherever they'd appeared. And then they would then, in tandem with us, work up what the abilities were. And we have on that game there's, unfortunately, our consistency drops occasionally, but we have that rule of every button has to do something. So every character has to do something on a button press, on a button tap, so that you know that embodiment of that character, whether it is Juggernaut, whether it is Lockjaw, or whether it's Iron Man Hulk, even like, you know, Agent Coulson. Whoever it is, the character has to be brought to life because this is something that people are so passionate about. Everyone's worn Spider-Man pajamas. They've had a duvet. No matter how old you are, you've had that experience of having a comic book touch on your life. And as such, you know what you expect. And then as we were running out of time, that was when Andy and the team were going back and going, "Look, we've just added another idle animation. We've added another personality touch here." And they were going back through adding as much as they can, right up to the death, like this game was worked on until submission week with new content. And we were doing it as a team with nobody knowing. And I remember, I was at – I think it was PlayStation 4 launch event in New York, that sort of November time, and I sat there talking to someone about the game and showing them the characters. And as I did it, Deadpool lifted his player ring up off the floor. So the little ring that the player mark of every character has, he lifted it up and put it over his head. And I was like, I've never, (a) I've never seen that, (b) I never signed it off, and (c) that was never on any one of our lists. And I remember going back and saying, "Um, what was this?" "Oh we added it in, we thought it would be really funny." And I was like, "It is, but we need to know everything that's in there. We need to make sure we've not done like a woopsie." And the fact is everything, I remember Chris from Marvel Games, he had the patience of a saint because he signed off and approved everything: every animation, every line of dialogue, every move, every particle effect, every inch every pixel of that game. And that's testament to, again, his passion for video games. So yeah, it's a lot of work.

(Musical interlude)

Chapter 3: Interview with Chris Baker – 23:25

Ethan Vincent

OK, so a lot to digest here, Brian, in our great chat with Arthur Parsons, and also a few names flying around that he mentioned. We have Andy, who is actually Andrew Dolan, one of the lead in-game animators at TT Games, who we had the pleasure of talking with, and we'll hear from him later. But Arthur also mentions Chris, who is Chris Baker. You and I also got to speak with him. Let's tell our listeners a little bit about him.

Brian Crecente

Yeah, Chris is the Creative Director at Zen Studios, but long ago back in the 2010s or so, he was at Marvel making sure people didn't give Mr. Fantastic Adamantium claws or Spidey the ability to turn invisible.

Ethan Vincent

Yes, he was the master of Marvel, approving everything about how a Marvel character looked, acted, sounded, moved in video games. So we chatted with him briefly about what that process was like.

Chris Baker

When LEGO Marvel Super Heroes came out, I was the – what was my title? Manager of License Games. That's what it was, Manager License Games at Marvel. So basically, it was – I was kind of the point person at Marvel with TT Games. And they would run things by me to go into the game. And I would say, "That's cool," or "Hey, you guys need to change Spider-Man's outfit a little bit here and there," or, "This story bit could use some work." So basically, brand assurance is what it's called. And it was my job to make sure that everything Marvel felt Marvel enough and was appropriate of the Marvel name.

Brian Crecente

So, the good news was, there were only like what? How many characters did they have in the – (laughs).

Chris Baker

God, I want to say, I could have told you – it was the most at the time. I know they've exceeded it since, but at the time, I know like, I did the math and it occurred to me if you play with each costume for one minute, you've already got like two hours of gameplay.

Brian Crecente

Wow. So, and you – like they had to run every one of those by you, it wasn't like they could just say we're gonna have all these characters, you had to – what was that process like? And what was it you were looking at when they'd say we're gonna have Hulk in here?

Chris Baker

Yeah, there's a very organized system. I think it's changed over the years at Marvel, but back when I was there, they'd submit something into the system, and it goes through legal and it goes through creative, which is where I was. And we make sure that it's something that belongs in the game to begin with, and then that it's representing whatever that aspect of the submission is. You know, if it's a character model, does it look like it should? Is there, you know, is a color off? Is an angle of Wolverine's things on his (chuckles) cowel, are they the right direction? Most of the time they were pretty good. And there is an

abstractness to just LEGO characters having sort of that LEGO DNA, so you can allow a little bit more leniency.

Brian Crecente

So did you – when you're doing this, when you're going through the process, were you ever doing any sort of checks where you're actually playing the game?

Chris Baker

Oh, yeah. Basically, when I was there, I don't know what they do now it's been a while, but just key milestones like alpha, beta. And yeah, I would spend hours playing the game and, you know, my primary responsibility was making sure the Marvel stuff was represented as it should be. But, you know, if I thought something wasn't up to par, or could be better I'd be like, "Hey, is there something we can do about this particular mission? Or, "You know, I think this kind of thing is popping up too much, maybe we can change some balance," you know, that kind of thing. QA basically. It wasn't my job to do QA, but basically, I had to make sure that the game was in a good state, and usually it was. It's kind of hard, as opposed to a lot of games, just because LEGO games are deceptively big. You know, you can usually beat them in eight or ten hours tops, but you're only like 20% through when you beat the game, right?

Brian Crecente

Right, right.

Chris Baker

There's that other 80% in finding characters and all that kind of stuff. So it takes a long time to do that, but yeah, we did have like milestones where we would approve it.

Brian Crecente

I mean, that's got to be daunting. Like all of those characters, all the settings, everything about it, all the lines. There's so many little jokes that are made and little asides that you hear, the idle animations, all that stuff. You're having to check all that, right? And make sure it's Marvel?

Chris Baker

Yeah, you know, a lot of it actually, I'm remembering now, there was a huge spreadsheet of – like all the characters were the column going down and all their abilities were at the top of the sheet, and they'd be x-ed in like, Hawkeye can shoot an arrow that lets him, you know, grappling hook, that kind of thing and, Black Widow, grappling hook, there's these very consistent abilities that LEGO characters and LEGO games have. It actually really wasn't that hard to make sure that everyone was doing the things they could do because you had it all on paper. It takes a long time just to read through all that. I can only imagine how long it takes to map it out on their end.

Brian Crecente

Were there any, you know, you played through this, you had to look through a lot of it. Were there any sort of things that really stuck out to you, any favorite moments that you can remember?

Chris Baker

I remember Howard the Duck (quacking sounds from gameplay). We had – there's a mission where you go to Marvel, which, you know, in Marvel Comics, Marvel Comics does exist, it's kind of a meta thing like that. I can't remember if they put Marvel in themselves or if it was our idea, but I'm glad they did. But they had a mission where Howard the Duck was teaming with the Vulture from Spider-Man –

(Excerpt from Howard the Duck gameplay: "Vulture's got no business being here – ")

Chris Baker

– to protest like the lack of bird representation (chuckles) in games or something. And you know, but on my end, it was like, "You know, Howard the Duck's a good guy. You guys, this is a fun idea, but is it off-brand to have Howard the Duck kind of fight our heroes?" And so the way we got around that: We had Howard the Duck kind of comically fire a bazooka that actually hit himself and he knocked himself out, so you don't actually fight Howard the Duck. So it was just like a kind of fun way around, you know, keeping their fun idea, but making it just a little off-brand not completely off-brand. It's Howard the Duck. You have a little more leeway with that kind of thing.

Brian Crecente

What I like, speaking of a lack of representation, I want to know why you didn't have any anthropomorphic cow people.

Chris Baker

(Laughs) You and your Lady Bova fixation. I remember this.

Brian Crecente

Yes, I told her, I had forgotten, but yes, I really wanted Lady Bova in the game and you had so many characters, but she was not one of them.

Chris Baker

No, that is true. There was also no Hellcow. Are you familiar with Hellcow the vampire cow?

Brian Crecente

Yes. Hellcow. Yes. I think someone brought that up to me after I started going on and on about Lady Bova (laughs).

Chris Baker

Yeah, yeah. Well, you know, I didn't play all the way through number two, so maybe one or both of them is in there. But yeah, sorry for the lack of cow representation, lack of bovine representation there.

Ethan Vincent

You mentioned that this is all being done right after Avengers comes out. And, you know, Iron Man 3 is the next movie, and obviously, you have to kind of dive in and dip into the universe, which you can do based on comics, but the pop culture might have not been fully there for some of the characters. So, how did you see that in terms of like the job TT Games and Marvel did at bringing some of those heroes and minifigs to life that maybe didn't have quite the pop culture representation they have today?

Chris Baker

Yeah, I think a lot of, I mean, a huge portion of the characters probably were not well known to people who only watch the movies. I mentioned Guardians of the Galaxy earlier. I know there's some fun kind of side missions where you have to find the sax for Drax because Drax loves to play the sax. You know, actually yeah, one thing I do remember correcting them on, that I had to, was Groot. Because there's a mission, there's several missions where you have Groot give you something to do. And they actually had words for him. And it's like, "No, no, you can't do that! He says I am Groot. He'll say it differently". And I was there for the voice session on that. It was pretty hilarious. I think it was – I think it was John DiMaggio. Yeah, I think it was him.

(Groot shouts: I am Groot!)

Ethan Vincent

Yeah, I mean, it's so cool you caught that because, boy, wouldn't have been kind of one of those, look back faux pas, like, "What are we doing here, guys?" You know?

Chris Baker

Oh, absolutely. Absolutely. Yeah. You know, I will admit, like if you go back and look at the Guardians together, their outfits are kind of mismatched, you know? They not only are different looking than they are in the movies, but you know, they never really had those distinct looks as a team when they show up at the very end. Oh! Here's a cool story. My boss at the time, TQ Jefferson, and me, and our marketing guy Javon Frazier and the whole TT team, we had like a big Comic-Con dinner where, you know, we just kind of talked about games, and this game, and that kind of stuff. And my boss was like – I think it was, TQ and Arthur were like, "You know, it'd be hilarious if like we did this fake-out where it looked like the Black Panther shows up at the end, but we totally make it look like it's Batman." And, you know, I'm sitting here like, "You know, that's awesome, but are we really going to do that?" Because that is not like something I'm used to, you know us being

able to do. But we did it and, you know, it's like right at the end of the story mode. It totally looks like Batman is gonna show up (chuckles), and the Black Panther pops out who is a character that probably a lot of people didn't know who he was at the time.

(Excerpt from the Black Panther scene in LEGO Marvel Super Heroes)

Chapter 4: LEGO Marvel Super Heroes Easter Eggs – 34:57

Brian Crecente

You know, Ethan, I've known Chris for years – actually, for more than a decade. He's always been a great person to chat to about video games and comics.

Ethan Vincent

Yeah, it sounds like it. I mean, it was really fun to talk to him. What's cool is that after the recording of the interview with us for the podcast, he actually took the time to write up some additional thoughts, and even shared a fun little Easter egg or two.

Brian Crecente

Yeah, you know, they're pretty fun little things, for instance, the title screen for LEGO Marvel Super Heroes is this great view of outer space with LEGO brick asteroids blowing up, and of course, this view of Silver Surfer. But Chris told us that he thought it would be funny to add another Marvel character in that screen. And he thinks that very few people actually noticed it. So if you go into the launch screen, and you don't touch any buttons or anything, and you let it just sit there for a minute, you'll notice in the bottom left corner a little character, and that character is actually a LEGO brick version of Ego the Living Planet.

Ethan Vincent

Nice.

Brian Crecente

And remember, this is way before Ego played this major role in the Guardians of the Galaxy 2 movie.

Ethan Vincent

That's cool. Yeah, Chris also pointed out that the game has a few slight nods to the Konami X-Men arcade game, you know, when you're on Magneto's Island. The biggest is that you fight, what you think is Magneto, until it's revealed it's actually Mystique in disguise. It's kind of cool, which happens in Konami's game, too. So Chris said he also thinks they put raptors in there to kind of evoke the feeling of fighting those big alligator people in the arcade game.

Brian Crecente

That's great. I love that game. That was this big arcade machine with like, I think four players at the same time.

Ethan Vincent

Yeah

Brian Crecente

So finally, Chris said he looked into whether TT could slip in the theme music from the X-Men animated series in the X-Mansion level. But it turned out to be a non-starter because of the high costs for licensing that music from Saban.

Ethan Vincent

Ah, licensing. Isn't that fun, Brian? Don't we love licensing?

Brian Crecente

It's my favorite, it's my favorite part of this podcast.

Ethan Vincent

It's almost a game, too – just the game of licensing.

(Music interlude)

Chapter 5: Interview with Andy Dolan – 37:07

Ethan Vincent

As I mentioned before, you know, Brian and I had a chance to talk to TT Games' lead in-game animator, Andy Dolan. He's the animator that Arthur talked about earlier – the one who didn't know how to say no – and helped in creating many characters in the game. And obviously, Andy had an amazing ability to motivate his team. And so here's our interview with Andy.

Brian Crecente

What was your process for figuring out how to make each character unique?

Andy Dolan

Well, that is always the big question for the LEGO games. We do have a lot of characters. When you got so many characters you have to put – there's a lot of work to do, obviously, and you have to try and find a way to make them all as unique as possible without blowing the budget time-wise. So basically, you just break it down. You look at the characters, you

work out which are the most important characters, which is difficult to do when they're all so big. So yeah, that was a lot to think about.

Brian Crecente

Did you have a particular favorite character among – I mean, was there one that stood out for you as your favorite?

Andy Dolan

At the start of the project, I would say, I mean Spider-Man straight away. That's the one I wanted to animate, to play within the game, to control, and it was something completely different. We had developing of the web swinging mechanic, we had Spider-Man swinging through New York City, and that was an amazing thing to develop, so that one really stood out for me. But there were so many as well. Mr. Fantastic was another one. But from the start of the project I think my favorite was Spider-Man, but by the end I think maybe I was leaning more towards Mr. Fantastic because he was so much fun as well with his stretchy limbs and strange transforms – turning into teapots and screwdrivers and all kinds of things. So we had a lot of fun with that one.

Brian Crecente

You know, it's interesting, like in many ways you must have, when you were designing this, you're essentially breaking some of those inherent rules that were built into what you can and can't do for the LEGO Group in terms of minifigs. Like the idea of stretching a minifigure's limbs. Did you have to have a conversation at the beginning with the LEGO Group about what was and wasn't allowed in terms of these minifigs?

Andy Dolan

Absolutely, especially with Mr. Fantastic. I mean you're absolutely right. The first thing is, can we stretch this guy out to, you know, to wrap his arms around things and to lift himself up, and we had his feet scaling right up, which is something we've always been told, you know, we're not allowed to do that, you can't do that with a LEGO toy. But fortunately, we were allowed to make an exception for Mr. Fantastic. The LEGO Group gave us permission to really go to town with him and then – so that, yeah, that was a lot of fun as well to break all the rules. (chuckles)

Brian Crecente

So in terms of creating so many animations for so many characters, were you trying to sort of, for all of them lean more towards the comic books, or animation or towards – animation meaning cartoons that were out there – or the movies, or did you sort of mix them all together? Like, how did you come up with what you wanted to base them on?

Andy Dolan

I would say it was very much a mix. I mean, I've got shelves full of comics right here in the room with me, so I did look at a lot of the comics, especially for things like the idle poses. I captured a lot of images, made some like storyboards for the team's character guides we call them, that I gave out to the team so they can see the kind of poses that we want to aim for. But when it came to things like fight moves maybe, more things that were in motion so maybe then we'd look more at the films, and try and capture some of the cool moves that Captain America might do with the shield and things like that. And the cartoons as well, I mean, I've certainly – I remember, I remember we made Ice Man freeze himself and burst out of it like, I don't know if you remember Spider-Man and Friends from way back in the – I think it's from the 70s, but I must have watched the reruns. (chuckles) So yeah, really from all over.

Brian Crecente

Oh, and it seems like, I know Arthur was saying that you sort of snuck in a lot of neat little jokes and animations that maybe even surprised them as they were viewing things. How often were you trying to sneak in the sort of, I guess, animated Easter eggs. And are there any particular ones you're really proud of?

Andy Dolan

All the time. That is something we love to do, especially in the idle animations when you leave the character standing alone for too long. It's always good to try and do, you know, get a little gag in there if you can. I mean it's a LEGO game. It's cool, but you know, they're also fun, a lot of it is about the humor of the characters. So some that stand out maybe, I remember one of my favorites was quite a simple one really. It's just Hawkeye if you leave him standing there he'll just fire his bow into the sky, and if you wait a moment then an apple with an arrow through it will fall out of the sky, or sometimes a fish, a random fish would fall out of the sky with an arrow through it. Things like that. Sandman, I really loved Sandman's idle animation, he'd turn himself into a sandcastle, and then he'd knock it over because he's a bully.

Brian Crecente

Oh, nice.

Andy Dolan

Knock over his own sandcastle. And also he'd turned into a cannon when he shoots it as well. And think John Hall was the animator on that character, he came up with some great ideas.

Ethan Vincent

I mean, just the passion of that, too, like, there's an idle character not doing anything, and you could say yeah, you're not playing, that's what happens when you don't play your

character. But the fact that you are going through every character and seeing what else can we add? What can be fun? Add that to 200, and more, characters, and my mind's kind of blown, like, how did you do that?

Andy Dolan

Well, we have a very talented team first of all, very talented team of animators. And when you give them these characters, as well, it inspires them, you know, it fills them with ideas. And sometimes it's difficult to stop them, you know? So yeah, we just had a lot of fun doing it. It's not really a job sometimes, it's just fun to come up with these ideas and get them working in the game.

Brian Crecente

So I'm assuming, obviously, you had a big team working on things and so different people had different characters they worked on. Did you specifically work on any characters? Or were you more sort of overseeing everybody else's work?

Andy Dolan

I was very much overseeing everyone else's work. I did animate Spider-Man. It's something that I've not done since being a lead on a project because I've quickly found out that I didn't have much time to do anything else.

Brian Crecente

Oh, right.

Andy Dolan

It's a big job, big responsibilities to animate Spider-Man, and I did bring in some animators to help me out towards the end with some of the web-swinging, getting the extra, you know, the tricks and the spins and the flips. Just to get him really awesome. But I mean, that had always been a dream of mine so I couldn't pass up the opportunity to animate Spider-Man really.

Brian Crecente

That's very cool.

Andy Dolan

Yeah, I mean there's always competition at the start of the project. I always like to ask the animators if there's any favorite characters that they have. And there's always a lot, you know, there's always, sometimes quite obscure favorites that people have that they want to animate. And it's great. It's great to see that passion. And if somebody is enthusiastic about a character like that, you know it's going to show in the work.

(Musical interlude)

Chapter 6: Final Thoughts by Arthur Parsons – 44:25

Arthur Parsons

I remember the reviews as they came in.

Ethan Vincent

Here, Arthur Parsons speaking again.

Arthur Parsons

The reviews, a lot of them noted that this was, this was like our love letter to the Marvel universe. It's so true on so many levels, because of all the content, whether it's some – like I say, something from the Golden Age, something from the 70s, Fantastic 4-like cartoon, whether it's something from one of the movies, whether it's something from a TV show, we've kind of invented thinking it's going to become a thing, and guess what? That it did.

Ethan Vincent

Yeah, in a very big way.

Arthur Parsons

Yeah, absolutely. And I still laugh as well. I would love to know how many people actually saw the credits, because the credits on this game, for me – especially now that Stan Lee is no longer with us, sadly – it's one of those magical moments having Stan sort of like narrate at the ending of the game, and exactly how it should have ended. It's just magical. I would love to just know did everyone get – just finish the story and see those credits, because it is a magic, magic credit sequence. When we came up with the idea, it was a bit of, "Can we pull this off? Can we – ", and I remember seeing it for the first time and being like, wow! It's almost to the point of bringing a tear to my eye because it is so touching. It's all amazing. I love this game.

(Stan Lee narrating: Once more the world is safe, and the heroes have saved the day, and that, true believer, is exactly how it should have ended.)

(Postscript music)

Bits N' Bricks: Credits – 46:30

Ethan Vincent

Bits N' Bricks is made possible by LEGO Games. Your hosts are Brian Crecente and Ethan Vincent. Producing by Dave Tach. Our executive producer is Ronny Scherer. Creative direction and editing by Ethan Vincent. Writing by Brian Crecente. Mixing and sound

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